DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 665 HE 035 878

TITLE	Specialized Accreditation and Assuring Quality in Distance Learning. CHEA Monograph Series, 2002.
INSTITUTION	Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Hewlett Foundation, Inc., Garden City, NY.
REPORT NO	No-2
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	21p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.chea.org/pdf/mono_2_spec-accred_02.pdf?pubID=246.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accreditation (Institutions); *Accrediting Agencies; *Distance Education; *Higher Education; *Program Evaluation; *Standards

ABSTRACT

In summer 2002, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) surveyed 50 specialized (programmatic) accreditors to learn whether and to what extent these accreditors are involved in the accreditation of distance learning. Specialized accreditors review programs and freestanding schools in areas such as law, medicine, business, and nursing. "Distance learning" refers to educational or instructional activity that is delivered electronically to students at a distance. There are two findings of major significance in this review. First, only a modest number of programs reviewed by specialized accreditors are engaged in distance learning. Thirty-eight of the 50 accreditors indicate that some of their programs involve distance learning. Of the 12,838 programs accredited by these 38 organizations, 2,277 programs (17.7%) offer some instruction using distance learning. A second finding is that specialized accreditors report that they have limited need to develop separate standards, policies, and procedures. The major reason of this is their extensive use of competency-based accreditation standards to judge quality. The standards of specialized accreditors are focused first on the outcomes that students achieve and then on the resources and processes of a program. Specialized accreditors treat distance learning as a process or an alternative delivery system. Some examples of distance learning accreditation are provided. A list of specialized accreditors is included in an appendix. (SLD)

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Specialized Accreditation and Assuring Quality in Distance Learning

CHEA Monograph Series 2002, Number 2

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The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States. CHEA represents more than 3,000 colleges and universities and 60 national, regional, and specialized accreditors.

This monograph was prepared with support from the Hewlett Foundation.

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Specialized Accreditation and Assuring Quality in Distance Learning

December 2002

INTRODUCTION

In Summer 2002, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) surveyed 59 specialized (programmatic) accreditors to learn whether and to what extent these accreditors are involved in the accreditation of distance learning.[1] CHEA also sought to learn what standards, policies, and procedures are used by specialized accreditors to review distance learning. Specialized accreditors review programs and freestanding schools in areas such as law, medicine, business, and nursing. The specialized accreditors in this survey have been scrutinized for quality by CHEA or the United States Department of Education (USDE) and are recognized by CHEA, USDE, or both. Both the CHEA and USDE reviews include consideration of the effectiveness with which accrediting organizations address distance learning.

CHEA conducted a similar survey of institutional accreditors (regional and national) during December 2001-January 2002. The results of this survey are published in *Accreditation and Assuring Quality in Distance Learning* (CHEA Monograph Series 2002, Number 1, available on the CHEA Website www.chea.org).

For purposes of the survey, "distance learning" refers to educational or instructional activity that is delivered electronically to students at a distance. It includes, but is not limited to, synchronous or asynchronous learning environments with a variety of instructional models, e.g., audio or video computer conferencing, computer-mediated instruction, or Internet-based instruction.

GENERAL FINDINGS

There are two findings of major significance in this review of specialized accreditation and distance learning. First, only a modest number of programs reviewed by specialized accreditors are engaged in distance learning. Thirty-eight (38) of the 59 accreditors surveyed indicate that some of their programs involve distance learning. Of the 12,838 programs that are accredited by these 38 organizations, 2,277 programs (17.7%) offer some instruction using distance learning. And, distance learning is not the primary mode of instruction for any of these programs.

Second, when examining the quality of distance learning offerings, specialized accreditors report that they have limited need to develop separate standards, policies, and procedures. The major reason for this is their extensive use of competency-based accreditation standards to judge quality. The standards of specialized accreditors are focused first on the outcomes that students achieve and then on the resources and processes of a program (including its instructional methodology) under review. Specialized accreditors treat distance learning as a process or an alternative delivery system.

The approach of specialized accreditors to assuring quality in distance learning differs from institutional (regional and national) accrediting organizations that have developed common platforms, supplemental standards, or separate standards for this purpose. The variation in approach between specialized and institutional accreditors is driven by the different types of educational operations that they review. Specific professional fields such as nursing or law readily lend themselves to an examination of competencies when examining quality. Development of competencies at the institutional level, however, is much more complex. Institutional accreditors have

[1]The list of specialized accreditors is included in the Appendix.

found that examining an educational operation with a comprehensive range of programs and services calls for at least as much attention to resources and processes to assure quality.

DISTANCE LEARNING AND SPECIALIZED ACCREDITORS

As of July 2002, the 59 specialized accreditors that were part of this survey accredited 18,017 programs. Fifty three (53) of these accrediting organizations reported that 13,031 programs enrolled 1,871,815 students. The remaining six accreditors responding to the survey do not collect student enrollment information.

Fifty (50) of the 59 responding accreditors (84.7%) indicate that they collect information about whether their programs undertake distance learning:

- Thirty-eight (38) of the 50 specialized accreditors (76%) report that some of their programs offer some distance learning instruction. Distance learning, however, is not the primary mode of instruction:
  - These 38 organizations accredit 12,838 programs; and
  - 2,277 of the 12,838 programs (17.7%) offer some instruction through distance learning.
- Twelve (12) of the 50 specialized accreditors (24%) report that none of their accredited programs offers instruction through distance learning.
  - Five (5) of the 12 organizations accredit programs leading to a medical degree (allopathic medicine, osteopathic medicine, podiatric medicine, veterinary medicine, and Oriental medicine and acupuncture); and
  - Seven (7) organizations accredit programs in massage therapy, teacher education, Montessori education, dance, theatre, aviation, and liberal education.
- Nine (9) of the 59 specialized accreditors (15.2%) report that they do not collect information about whether their programs offered any instruction through distance learning.

USE OF COMPETENCY STANDARDS TO ASSURE QUALITY IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Specialized accreditors generally review programs that prepare students for specific professions such as occupational or physical therapy, business, engineering, interior design, medicine, pharmacy, and teaching. The majority of the specialized accreditors expect programs to demonstrate that their graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities generally regarded as essential for the entry-level professional in that field, regardless of the delivery mode of the instruction those programs provide.

Specialized accreditation standards are most frequently expressed in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the graduates of these programs need for entry into a profession. Fifty (50) of the 59 responding specialized accreditors (84.7%) have standards that are, are least in part, competency-based. This includes 32 of the 38 (84.2%) that accredit programs that offer distance learning. Some of the competency-based standards take the form of statements such as "Graduates must be able to..." or "Students demonstrate the ability to..." or "Graduates demonstrate understanding of..." In other instances, the standards may be more generally phrased, but the intent is the same.

This reliance on competency standards as the key means to assure quality enables specialized accreditors to apply these same standards to both distance learning and site-based learning. Expectations of competencies are the same across all types of instruction. All programs are required to meet the same standards for accreditation, regardless of method of instruction and regardless of whether distance- or site-based methods are used. Primary attention is paid to whether these skills are developed.

While most specialized accreditors use the same standards for distance learning and site-based instruction, some of them have also developed special policies or procedures for distance learn-

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ing. These may take the form of "guidelines" to be used both by programs considering a distance learning component and by on-site review teams in evaluating the distance learning component. In other instances, accreditors have formal "policy" statements on distance learning. In still other instances, policies or procedures may appear as an additional component of an existing standard that specifically addresses distance learning.

Whatever the particular format an accrediting organization chooses for these policies and procedures, the thrust is to require programs engaged in distance learning to have a well-defined rationale for distance learning that is consistent with the mission, goals, and objectives of the program and of the institution offering the program; adequate instructional and technological support for the faculty and students engaged in distance learning; adequate resources for distance learning; an adequate review program for the distance learning component; and student outcomes that are comparable to those in the campus-based program.

Thirty-eight Accrediting Organizations with Programs Offering Distance Learning: Numbers of Programs and Students*

Accreditor	No. of Programs	No. of Students	No. of Programs w/DL	No. of Students in DL
AACSB	424	195,800	40	4,895
AAFCS	58	25,465	35	8,000
AAMFT	94	2,700	6	300
AANA-COA	85	1,500	18	300
AANM	44	1,415	18	890
ABA	186	127,610	40	1,000
ABFSE	53	3,872	28	2,300
ACCE	60	10,000	40	6,000
ACEJMC	105	26,000	50	n/a
ACF	229	20,000	10	n/a
ACPE	86	39,322	4	1,925
ACPEI	320	4,000	1	19
ADA-CADE	611	14,801	121	329
ADA-CDA	1,334	42,550	300	13,000
ALA	58	13,872	36	n/a
AOA-ACOE	145	6,128	20	5,771
AOTA-ACOTE	319	15,927	74	4,410
APTA-CAPTE	429	22,033	48	2,618
ASHA	345	13,260	40	n/a
ASHA-CAAB	75	6,063	1	40
CAAHEP	2,011	76,217	1	n/a
CCNE	389	62,299	75	n/a
CEPH	81	15,000	27	n/a
COA	24	970	5	254
CORE	91	3,382	43	n/a
CSWE	624	55,586	208	10,000
JRCERT	654	20,000	327	n/a
JRCNMT	89	1,189	17	337
MEAC	10	322	1	51
NAACLS	512	4,000	128	1,000
NAIT	142	7,100	90	4,500
NANPWH	5	175	1	25
NASAD	232	146,497	1	0
NASM	582	113,054	1	7
NASPAA	135	n/a	33	n/a
NCATE	654	533,814	231	116,794
NLNAC	1,495	n/a	147	n/a
SAF	48	5,000	11	n/a

Source: *CHEA Survey of Specialized Accrediting Organizations*, Summer 2002

*Please see Appendix for a list of acronyms.

DISCUSSION

The focus of specialized accreditors on competency-based standards for specific learning outcomes has resulted in few of these accreditors making substantive changes to their standards to address quality in distance learning. In most instances, they have added a statement to indicate that programs must meet all of their standards regardless of the type of instructional methodology used.

Because specialized accreditors focus on programs that prepare students for a particular profession, they routinely seek information from representatives of the profession in establishing their standards. These representatives of the profession may be employers, members of a national or state licensing body, or practitioners who work in the profession. These individuals are more interested in learning outcomes than in the learning environment itself. They tend to think of an educational program not so much in terms of its place in academe or its role as an academic discipline, but in terms of its adequacy as preparation for the profession. Their contribution to the discussion of standards for accreditation in a particular field is to focus the discussion on what it is important for students to know and be able to do when they complete the program.

The net result is that specialized accreditation standards generally focus on very specific learning outcomes. They do so not to the exclusion of standards that address the resources and processes necessary to provide an education with those learning outcomes. However, learning outcomes play a central role in specialized accreditation. If those outcomes have been clearly established in terms of competencies expected of all graduates, it is not surprising that very little change is needed to specialized accreditation standards to accommodate distance learning.

For the future, specialized accreditors are likely moving toward incorporating an even stronger competency-based approach into their accreditation practices. For example, some accreditors that only a few years ago had standards that referred very generally to the necessity for programs to ensure that their students had the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to enter the profession after they graduate now have

Use of Competency-based Standards

Competency-based standards[2]	Largely competency-based, or, in a general sense, competency-standards based[3]	Largely content-based standards[4]
AAFCS	AALE	AACSB
AANA-COA	ABSFE	AAMFT
AANM	AOA-BPE	ABA
ABET	APMA	ACBSP
ACAOM	ASLA/LAAB	ACCE
ACEJMC	AVMA	ACEHSA
ACF	CAA	AICP/PAB
ACPE	CAAHEP	ALA
ACPEI	CACREP	SAF
ADA-CADE	CORE	
ADA-CDA	JRCERT	
AOA-ACOE	LCME	
AOTA-ACOTE	NAIT	
APA	NASPAA	
APTA-CAPTE	NLNAC	
ASHA		
CCE		
CCNE		
CEPH		
COA		
COMTA		
CSWE		
FIDER		
JRCNMT		
MACTE		
MEAC		
NAACLS		
NANPWH		
NASAD		
NASD		
NASM		
NAST		
NCATE		
NRPA-AALR		
TEAC		

[2]Standards in this category typically begin with words like "Graduates must be able to..." or "Students must demonstrate knowledge of..." and are followed with a fairly specific statement of a knowledge, skill, or ability students are expected to achieve upon completion of the program.

[3]Standards in this category typically contain only a very general reference to the skills, knowledge, and abilities students need to achieve in order to be prepared for entry into a specific profession.

[4]Standards in this category typically begin with words like "The curriculum must address the following subjects..." or "The curriculum must consist of XX hours of instruction in subject A..."

Source: *CHEA Survey of Specialized Accrediting Organizations*, Summer 2002

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explicit statements of expected knowledge, skills, and abilities in their standards. Others are taking steps to sharpen existing statements to ensure they remain current.

As this trend toward greater specificity of competencies in the requirements for accreditation continues among the specialized accreditation community, it may mean that fewer of them see the need for separate standards or even separate policies or procedures for distance learning. In fact, this has already happened, to some degree. One accreditor had separate guidelines for distance learning in its 1994 standards, but now chooses to view distance learning as an acceptable teaching method and to require programs that offer distance learning to meet the same competency-based standards as campus-based programs.

Other accreditors that do not have separate standards for distance learning are examining the practices of their colleagues with respect to distance learning, not to develop new standards for distance learning, but rather to obtain some guidance on how to interpret their existing standards in the distance learning environment. This information can be helpful either to programs that offer distance learning or to site team members who review programs with distance learning.

Specialized accreditation, with its focus on student learning outcomes, is particularly well positioned to handle the challenges distance learning presents to higher education and to assure the quality of any offerings that utilize that form of instructional methodology.

EXAMPLES

The following examples from the standards, policies, and procedures of specialized accreditors demonstrate how these accreditors have made appropriate changes to accommodate distance learning[5]. The examples are grouped according to the key areas of program activity that specialized accreditors routinely review.

Mission, Goals, and Objectives

In the distance learning environment, specialized accreditors focus on the relevance of the distance learning program and courses to the mission of both the institution and the sponsoring (campus-based) program. They also focus on demonstration of the need for the distance learning program in relation to the mission and goals of both the program and the sponsoring institution.

> *The mission and goals of a program offered entirely by the distance education method should be consistent with the goals and mission of the sponsoring institution. (ADA-CADE)*

> *If the school offers degree programs using non-traditional formats or methods, these programs must . . . be consistent with the mission of the school and within the school's established area of expertise. (CEPH)*

> *There must be a rationale for entering into distance learning. Distance learning must be consistent with the stated goals and objectives of the program. The mission of the program using distance learning technologies must be consistent with the mission of the institution. (ACEHSA)*

Curriculum and Instruction

Specialized accreditors' standards, policies, and practices related to curriculum and instruction vary considerably because of the different types of programs they accredit. Many of their standards for curriculum are expressed in terms of the competencies that graduates of an accredited program are expected to achieve, regardless of the instructional methodology the program uses. Thus, a common

[5]All examples listed are taken from accreditors' reference documents. For a complete listing of these documents, explanations of acronyms, and Website addresses, please see pages 12-16.

feature of most specialized accreditors with regard to the curriculum for a program that includes distance learning is the requirement for the curriculum to be equivalent to the site-based program.

When an identical program, or program with an identical title, is offered through distance learning as well as on campus, the institution must be able to demonstrate functional equivalency in all aspects of each program. Mechanisms must be established to assure equal quality among delivery systems. (NASAD, NASD, NASM, and NAST)

The core curriculum in distance education shall be comparable to the curriculum in the main campus program. (NASPAA)

Another common feature among specialized accreditors is a focus on the academic support necessary for distance learning.

The institution provides students doing course work through distance learning with adequate library and information access and support services. (AALE)

Students shall have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources. (NLNAC)

The program will assure that students in distance learning programs have access to all the necessary resources, including libraries and computer networks and other retrieval capabilities, and that they have the capability to effectively use them. (ACEHSA)

Still another common feature deals with student-faculty interaction, as well as student-student interaction, in the distance learning environment.

The course provides for appropriate interaction between faculty and students and among students. (APTA-CAPTE)

The course or program being presented electronically provides for appropriate real-time or delayed interaction between faculty and students and among students. (JRCNMT)

For distance learning educational activities, courses must provide active two-way communication between faculty and students and among students. (COA)

Some specialized accreditors, however, either due to the nature of their discipline or for other reasons, do not permit programs to offer a degree or certificate entirely through distance learning.

Students will receive at least 100 hours of face-to-face supervision [during their clinical experience]. (AAMFT-COAMFTE)

A law school shall not grant a student more than 4 credit hours in any term, nor more than a total of 12 credit hours, toward the J.D. Degree for courses qualifying under this Standard [Standard 306. Distance Education]. (ABA)

Students are required to go to a campus for at least two courses (restorative art and embalming). (ABFSE)

Faculty Support

In the distance learning environment, specialized accreditors focus on both technological support for faculty and appropriate training for faculty in the use of the technology.

Mechanisms for ongoing faculty development and involvement in the area of distance education and the use of technology in teach-learning processes are established. (AANM, NANPWH)

[The program] provides (or allows for) faculty support services specifically related to distance education and faculty development for faculty who teach in distance education program(s). (NLNAC)

The institution should offer appropriate training and support services to faculty who teach courses and programs electronically. (JRCNMT)

Student Support

In the distance learning environment, specialized accreditors focus on both the adequacy and the appropriateness of the support services provided to students.

> *Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services and resources appropriate to support their learning. Among the resources available are advising services, admissions, registration and scheduling, and information about financial aid. (APTA-CAPTE)*

> *Students shall have access to academic and administrative support services that are comparable to student services available to students on the main campus. (NASPAA)*

> *Students have access to the range of student services appropriate to support the program(s), including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, placement, and counseling; [and] means for resolving complaints. (NLNAC)*

In the distance learning environment, specialized accreditors are also concerned about the admissions process and about the information provided to prospective students.

> *The institution must admit to its distance educational programs only those students who are also prepared by background, knowledge, and technical skills to succeed in the distance delivery environment. (COA)*

> *[The school should] make program expectations for students clear in advance of enrollment whenever possible, and in no case later than the commencement of the course for which the student has enrolled. (AACSB)*

> *Prospective students in distance education programs should be provided with information about admission, technological competence, and skills needed to participate; equipment requirements; academic support services available; course and program completion requirements; and any additional costs for distance programming. (ADA-CADE)*

Resources

Specialized accreditors also address the adequacy of the resources a program has available to support distance learning.

> *For distance educational activities, the sponsor must demonstrate a commitment to ongoing support, both financial and technical, and to the continuation of the program for a period sufficient to enable enrolled students to complete the degree. (COA)*

> *There must be stable, continuing use of facilities (classrooms, office space, equipment, supplies, library access and resources, among others) and perhaps personnel for the distance education programs. (CSWE)*

> *The institution must provide financial and technical support commensurate with the purpose, size, scope, and content of its distance learning programs. (NASAD, NASD, NASM, NAST)*

Assessment of Educational Effectiveness

Specialized accreditors are especially focused on what students learn. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are equally concerned about the adequacy of programs' assessment systems to determine if their students are, in fact, learning what they are expected to learn.

> *The institution assumes the responsibility for establishing a means to assess student outcomes. This assessment includes overall program outcomes, in addition to specific course objectives, and a process for using the results for continuous program improvement. (AANM, NANPWH)*

> *The school must have an ongoing program to evaluate the effectiveness of the format, to assess teaching and learning methodologies and to systematically use this information to stimulate program improvements. (CEPH)*

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The institution evaluates the courses/programs offered electronically for their educational effectiveness, including assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction. (JRCNMT)

Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes are a major focus of specialized accreditation. Fifty (50) of the 59 specialized accreditors (and 32 of the 38 that accredit programs that offer at least some instruction via distance learning technologies) have standards that are competency-based, i.e., that focus on what students learn. Thus, it is fairly common to find statements such as the following among specialized accreditors:

The Council requires that distance education programs and courses achieve the same outcomes as traditional educational offerings. (AANA-COA)

Evidence should document that students demonstrate the same learning outcomes and attain the same educational competencies in the distance education program as they would in a traditional on-campus program. (ADA-CADE)

When utilizing distance learning methods, a program provides learning opportunities that facilitate development of students' clinical competence and...establishes mechanisms to measure these outcomes. (AANM, NANPWH)

While it is fairly common for specialized accreditors to address mission, goals, and objectives; curriculum and instruction, faculty support; student support; assessment; and student learning outcomes in the distance learning environment, some accreditors have focused on additional topics, as illustrated by the following:

Distance learning courses may be incorporated in an accredited construction education program's curriculum [if] the distance learning courses will be accepted for transfer credit as reviewed and accepted by the accredited university programs. (ACCE)

Programs departing from campus-centered education by offering distance learning...must demonstrate that the intentions of [the accreditor's residency] guidelines are being achieved. The intentions of this guideline are to ensure significant interaction with other students and with faculty, hands-on collaborative work, socialization into the norms and aspirations of the profession, and observations by faculty of students' interpersonal and communication skills. (AICP-PAB)

The distance education component should operate with nondiscrimination policies which are comparable to those on the main campus. Promotion of equity and cultural diversity should be concerns of this setting as well. (CSWE)

All instructional delivery models—correspondence courses, extension courses, distance learning—shall be incorporated into the comprehensive long-range plan for the academic unit. (NRPA-AALR)

Another fairly common practice among specialized accreditors with respect to distance learning is to develop special guidelines, policies, and/or procedures for the site visit. For example, one accreditor (AOTA-ACOTE) requires each site team that evaluates a program that is offered primarily by distance education to have at least one member who is familiar with that technology. Several other accreditors (e.g., ABSFE, MEAC, NCATE, and others) have developed a set of questions that site visitors are to address when they evaluate any program that offers distance learning. Still others (e.g., ACCE, CACREP, and others) address issues related to comparability of the on-site review process for distance learning to that for site-based instruction. ACCE, for example, specifies that the program shall display on-site the same type of distance learning course material for evaluation as would be displayed for a conventionally offered course (e.g.,

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syllabus, textbooks, student work, etc.). CACREP states that programs using alternative instruction methods will be subject to the same level of review as programs that employ more traditional means.

Specialized Accreditors: Standards, Policies, and Procedures for Distance Learning

Accreditor	Special Standard for DL?	Other Consideration for DL?	Comments
AACSB	No	Yes	Has a booklet that provides guidance both to schools developing DL programs and to peer reviewers evaluating DL programs.
AAFCS	No	No	Regards DL as an instructional methodology and requires all programs, regardless of methodology, to meet the same standards.
AALE	Yes	No	Requires all programs, including those using DL, to meet all of the agency's educational standards.
AAMFT	No	Yes	Requires the clinical aspects of a program to be conducted face to face even if parts of the program are delivered via DL.
AANA-COA	Yes	No	Requires DL programs/courses to meet all standards and to achieve the same educational outcomes as campus-based programs.
AANM	No	Yes	Uses a special policy statement on DL developed by the Alliance for Nursing Accreditation.
ABA	Yes	No	Does not accredit programs that are 100% DL and limits the total number of credits that may be earned through DL to 12.
ABET	No	No	Regards DL as an instructional methodology and requires all programs, regardless of methodology, to meet the same standards.
ABFSE	No	Yes	Has an appendix to its standards that contains guidelines for electronic and distance learning.
ACAOM	No	No	At the present time, does not accredit programs that offer training through DL.
ACBSP	No	Yes	Has endorsed "Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs" adopted by the regional accreditors in 2001.
ACCE	No	Yes	Requires programs with DL to meet all standards and addresses aspects of DL under its existing curriculum standard.
ACEHSA	No	Yes	Has separate guidelines for distance learning technologies.
ACEJMC	No	No	Regards DL as an instructional methodology and requires all programs, regardless of methodology, to meet the same standards.

Accreditor	Special Standard for DL?	Other Consideration for DL?	Comments
ACF	No	No	Plans to study the issue and determine if it needs to develop new standards and/or revise existing ones to address DL.
ACPE	No	No	Is studying other accreditors' approaches to DL so it can develop guidelines to help programs interpret its standards in relation to DL.
ACPEI	No	No	Regards DL as an instructional methodology and requires all programs, regardless of methodology, to meet the same standards.
ADA-CADE	No	Yes	Requires the same learning outcomes/educational competencies in DL programs. Provides "examples of evidence" for DL programs.
ADA-CDA	No	No	Regards DL as an instructional methodology and requires all programs, regardless of methodology, to meet the same standards.
AICP-PAB	No	Yes	Requires programs that offer DL to demonstrate that the intentions of its residency guidelines are being achieved.
ALA	No	No	Requires programs to meet all standards regardless of the forms or locations of delivery.
AOA-ACOE	No	No	Requires programs to meet all standards regardless of the method of delivery of instruction.
AOA-BPE	No	No	Currently does not accredit programs that offer DL and does not foresee that the profession will move toward DL.
AOTA-ACOTE	No	Yes	Requires at least one site team member to be familiar with DL technology if the program being evaluated is largely DL.
APA	No	No	Requires all programs to meet all standards.
APMA	No	No	Does not accredit programs that offer DL.
APTA-CAPTE	No	Yes	Has a policy statement on DL that stresses the requirement for equivalence of DL to site-based education.
ASHA	No	Yes	Requires DL to meet all the standards and also requires programs adding DL to submit a request for approval of a substantive change.
ASLA-LAAB	No	No	Is considering developing a policy for DL.
AVMA-COE	No	No	Does not accredit any programs that offer DL.
CAA	No	No	Has a task force considering DL and may make some changes to its standards and/or policies in the future.
CAAHEP	No	No	Does not distinguish between DL and site-based instruction and uses the same standards for both.
CACREP	No	Yes	Requires programs using alternative instructional methods (e.g., DL) to meet the same standards as site-based programs.

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Accreditor	Special Standard for DL?	Other Consideration for DL?	Comments
CCE	No	No	Is studying the issue but currently requires programs offering DL courses to submit a request for approval of a substantive change.
CCNE	No	No	Uses standards and guidelines that are based on student competencies so sees no need for different standards for DL.
CEPH	Yes	No	Requires DL format/structure to be appropriate for adult learners and the academic rigor to be comparable to that in site-based programs.
COA	No	No	Requires all programs to meet the standards regardless of when, where, or how instruction takes place or who teaches it.
COMTA	No	No	Does not provide a DL option in its accreditation process.
CORE	No	No	Requires all programs to meet all standards regardless of instructional methodology.
CSWE	No	No	Considers DL an acceptable teaching method but is looking at programs' experiences to determine if the standards need revision.
FIDER	No	No	Makes no direct reference to mode of instruction but relies heavily on site visitors' evaluation of student learning outcomes.
JRCERT	No	No	Regards DL as an instructional methodology and requires all programs, regardless of methodology, to meet the same standards.
JRCNMT	No	Yes	Has separate guidelines for DL.
LCME	No	No	Does not accredit programs that offer DL.
MACTE	No	No	Has a task force studying DL that will determine if changes to the standards are necessary.
MEAC	No	No	Requires DL and site-based programs to meet the same standards and expects initial counseling of DL students to be in person.
NAACLS	No	No	Considers its existing standards flexible enough to apply to DL programs.
NAIT	No	No	Says DL is very limited in the field due to the significant number of laboratory courses that are required.
NANPWH	No	Yes	Has adopted the DL policy statement of the Alliance for Nursing Accreditation and has also developed DL questions for programs.
NASAD	Yes	No	Requires DL programs to meet all operational and curricular standards, including the functions and competencies stated in them.

Accreditor	Special Standard for DL?	Other Consideration for DL?	Comments
NASD	Yes	No	Requires DL programs to meet all operational and curricular standards, including the functions and competencies stated in them.
NASM	Yes	No	Requires DL programs to meet all operational and curricular standards, including the functions and competencies stated in them.
NASPAA	Yes	No	Requires assessment processes for DL to ensure the comparability of the education offered via distance to campus-based education.
NAST	Yes	No	Requires DL programs to meet all operational and curricular standards, including the functions and competencies stated in them.
NCATE	No	Yes	Requires DL programs to meet the standards at the same level of quality as those offered through traditional means.
NLNAC	No	Yes	Has a DL policy statement similar to the regionals and has adapted North Central's statement on what constitutes successful DL.
NRPA-AALR	No	No	Requires all instructional methodologies,including DL, to be incorporated into a long-range plan for the academic unit.
SAF	Yes	Yes	Has proposed language to address DL that is expected to be incorporated into a standard and/or policy in late 2002.
TEAC	No	No	Does not accredit any distance learning programs at the present time.

APPENDIX

List of Acronyms and Websites

AACSB	AACSB International–The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business *www.aacsb.edu*
AAFCS	American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences *www.aafcs.org*
AALE	American Academy for Liberal Education *www.aale.org*
AAMFT	American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education *www.aamft.org*
AANA-COA	American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs *www.aana.com*
AANM	American College of Nurse-Midwives, Division of Accreditation *www.midwife.org*

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ABA	American Bar Association, Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar *www.abanet.org/legaled/*
ABET	Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology *www.abet.org*
ABFSE	Accreditation Board of Funeral Service Education *www.abfse.org*
ACAOM	Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine *www.acaom.org*
ACBSP	Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs *www.acbsp.org*
ACCE	American Council for Construction Education *www.acce-hq.org*
ACEHSA	Accrediting Commission on Education for Health Services *www.acehsa.org*
ACEJMC	Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications *www.ukans.edu/~acejmc*
ACF	American Culinary Federation, Inc. *www.acfchefs.org*
ACPE	American Council on Pharmaceutical Education *www.acpe-accredit.org*
ACPEI	Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc., Accreditation Commission *www.acpe.edu*
ADA-CADE	American Dietetic Association, Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education *www.eatright.org/caDE*
ADA-CDA	American Dental Association, Commission on Dental Accreditation *www.ada.org*
AICP-PAB	American Institute of Certified Planners/Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, Planning Accreditation Board *www.netins.net/showcase/pab_fi66*
ALA	American Library Association, Committee on Accreditation *www.ala.org/accreditation.html*
AOA-ACOE	American Optometric Association, Accreditation Council on Optometric Education *www.aoanet.org/accreditation.html*
AOA-BPE	American Osteopathic Association, Bureau of Professional Education *www.aoa-net.org*
AOTA-ACOTE	American Occupational Therapy Association, Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education *www.aota.org*
APA	American Psychological Association, Committee on Accreditation *www.apa.org*
APMA	American Podiatric Medical Association, Council on Podiatric Medical Education *www.apma.org*
APTA-CAPTE	American Physical Therapy Association, Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education *www.apta.org*
ASHA	American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology *www.asha.org*
ASLA	American Society of Landscape Architects, Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board *www.asla.org*
AVMA-COE	American Veterinary Medical Association, Council on Education *www.avma.org*

CAA	Council on Aviation Accreditation *www.caaaccreditation.org*
CAAHEP	Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs *www.caahep.org*
CACREP	Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs *www.counseling.org/CACREP*
CCE	Council on Chiropractic Education, Commission on Accreditation *www.cce-usa.org*
CCNE	Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education *www.aacn.nche.edu/accreditation*
CEPH	Council on Education for Public Health *www.ceph.org*
COA	Commission on Opticianry Accreditation *www.coaccreditation.com*
COMTA	Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation *www.comta.org*
CORE	Council on Rehabilitation Education, Commission on Standards and Accreditation *www.core-rehab.org*
CSWE	Council on Social Work Education, Division of Standards and Accreditation *www.cswe.org*
FIDER	Foundation for Interior Design Education Research *www.fider.org*
JRCERT	Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology *www.jrcert.org*
JRCNMT	Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Nuclear Medicine Technology *www.jrcnmt.org*
LCME	Liaison Committee on Medical Education *www.lcme.org*
MACTE	Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, Commission on Accreditation *www.MACTE.org*
MEAC	Midwifery Education Accreditation Council *www.meacschools.org*
NAACLS	National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences *www.naacls.org*
NAIT	National Association of Industrial Technology *www.nait.org*
NANPWH	National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health, Council on Accreditation *www.npwh.org*
NASAD	National Association of Schools of Art and Design *www.arts-accredit.org*
NASD	National Association of Schools of Dance *www.arts-accredit.org*
NASM	National Association of Schools of Music *www.arts-accredit.org*
NASPAA	National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration *www.naspaa.org*
NAST	National Association of Schools of Theatre *www.arts-accredit.org*

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NCATE	National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education *www.ncate.org*
NLNAC	National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission, Inc. *www.nlnac.org*
NRPA-AALR	National Recreation and Park Association, American Association for Leisure and Recreation *www.activeparks.org/education*
SAF	Society of American Foresters *www.safnet.org*
TEAC	Teacher Education Accreditation Council *www.teac.org*

Reference Documents for Accrediting Organizations' Standards, Policies, and/or Procedures Related to Distance Learning[6]

AACSB	Standards for Business Accreditation, revised February 14, 2001, and "Quality Issues in Distance Learning," July 1999
AAFCS	Accreditation Document for Undergraduate Programs in Faculty and Consumer Sciences, 2001 Edition
AALE	Standards and Criteria for Institutional Accreditation and Preaccreditation
AMFT	Standards of Accreditation, Version 10.1
AANA-COA	AANA Policy on Distance Education and Standards for Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs
AANM	Alliance for Nursing Accreditation, "Statement on Distance Education Policies," March 2002 (revised) and The Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice, May 1997
ABA	Standard 306, Distance Education, adopted August 2002
ABET	Criteria for Accrediting Engineering Programs, approved November 3, 2001
ABFSE	ABSFE Accreditation Manual Chapter IX and Appendix E, Electronic and Distance Learning Guidelines
ACAOM	Accreditation Handbook
ACBSP	Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate/Graduate Degree Institutions
ACCE	Form 103, Standards and Criteria for Baccalaureate Programs
ACEHSA	Guidelines for Distance Learning Technologies and Accreditation Criteria, revised in 2001
ACEJMC	ACEJMC Accrediting Standards, effective September 1, 2001, and Principles of Accreditation, adopted September 16, 2000
ACF	Standards for the American Culinary Federation Accrediting Commission
ACPE	Standards for Curriculum, ACPE Accreditation Manual—September 2000
ACPEI	The Standards of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education 2002
ADA-CADE	CADE Accreditation Manual, 2002
ADA-CDA	CDA Accreditation Standards for Dental Education Programs, updated August 2002
AICP-PAB	The Accreditation Document, May 2001
ALA	1992 Standards for Accreditation
AOA-ACOE	Accreditation Manual: Professional Optometric Degree Programs, July 2001
AOA-BPE	Accreditation of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, revised June 2001
AOTA-ACOTE	Standards for an Accredited Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, adopted December 1998
APA	Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs of Professional Psychology, March 1, 2002
APMA	CPME 120, Standards and Requirements for Accrediting Colleges of Podiatric Medicine
APTA-CAPTE	Accreditation Handbook, revised April 2002, policy statement entitled "Principles of Good Practice in Distance Learning"

[6]Most of these reference documents are available on the agencies' Websites.

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ASHA	Substantive Change Policy, October 2001 and Standards for Accreditation of Graduate Education Programs, effective January 1, 1999
ASLA-LAAB	Accreditation Standards
AVMA-COE	Council on Education Policies and Procedures—July 2002
CAA	Appendix B, CAA Form 101, Accreditation Standards Manual, revised June 2001
CAAHEP	Standards and Guidelines
CACREP	The 2001 Standards
CCE	Standards for Doctor of Chiropractic Programs and Institutions, January 2002
CCNE	The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice, May 1998 and CCNE Standards for Accreditation of Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing Education Programs, amended August 1998
CEPH	Accreditation Criteria, amended January 2002, Criterion V.H
COA	Essentials of an Accredited Program for Opticianry, effective September 1, 2002
COMTA	Standards, updated 5.02
CORE	CORE Newsletter, November 2001, and the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) Accreditation Manual
CSWE	2001 Standards
FIDER	Professional Standards 2002
JRCERT	Standards for an Accredited Educational Program in Radiologic Sciences, effective January 1, 2002
JRCNMT	JRCNMT Guidelines for Electronically Presented Programs in NMT and the JRCNMT Essentials
LCME	LCME Accreditation Standards
MACTE	Accreditation Handbook, June 2001
MEAC	MEAC Standards, April 1, 1998, and "Criteria and Questions for Programs or Institutions Offering Distance Education, approved 10/99"
NAACLS	Standards of Accredited Educational Programs for the Clinical Laboratory Technician/Medical Laboratory Technician, Requirements for Accreditation
NAIT	Industrial Technology Accreditation Handbook—2000
NANPWH	"Suggested Questions for Directors of Distance Education Programs," Evaluator Handbook, Appendix A.1 and Alliance for Nursing Accreditation, "Statement on Distance Education Policies," March 2002
NASAD	Handbook, 2001-2002, Standard II.L
NASD	Handbook, 2002, Standard II.L
NASM	2001-2002 Handbook, Standard II.L
NASPAA	Standards, January 2000 edition, Standard 9.0
NAST	Handbook, 2001-2002, Standard II.L
NCATE	Handbook for Accreditation Visits and Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education
NLNAC	Policy #15: Distance Education, and Standards and Criteria—2002
NRPA-AALR	Accreditation Standards Part II—The Standards
SAF	SAF Task Force on Forestry Education Accreditation, May 2000, and the Accreditation Handbook, updated October 2000
TEAC	Manual for a New System for the Accreditation of Programs in Teacher Education

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